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The Indian Diaspora

Abstract: Diaspora may be defined as per the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries. Originally it was considered as the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland, especially involuntarily, as Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade or the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country is Diaspora If we turn the pages of history we will find that the Jews and the Greeks were one of the first communities who had the transitional period. Gradually, more immigration followed by the Africans, Chinese, Lebanese, and also the Indians.

People migrated from India to Ceylon and South East Asia to spread Buddhism. The Buddhist missionaries travelled far and wide for spreading their religion and had to pass through great ordeals and so they had the Diasporic feeling. The modern Indian Diaspora further strengthened in nineteenth century British Imperialism. The British trade flourished worldwide and for this task Britain depended upon continuing streams of emigrants to all its colonies. They took labourers aside from the African ex-slaves and European immigrants, the colonial governments turned to the roughly 250 million inhabitants of India. Most of the Hindi-

speaking from Northern subcontinents were resettled from India to British Caribbean after being promised fair wages and return travel to India in exchange for a predetermined number of year spent in working in the colonies. Thus the first pouring out of the Indians started 1840's. These labourers had to work in iron factories or coal mines but the life of these coalminers was so very miserable that many use to die because of ill health and Diasporic feelings. Then emerged the first generation of the western-educated Indians. Eventually, after 1911, many Indians shifted to the join Hindu colonies overseas, where they successfully earned for their children better economic future through sheer perseverance, labour and thrift but their literature in the form of poetry, novels, prose and journals has a deep reflection of the Indian Diaspora, Through stories, novels, plays and poetry the Diasporic sensibilities were given a challenge Thus through this paper I have made my humble effort to peep and reflect the problems and difficulties and the hopes and expectations of these overseas Indian communities Now the Indian government is also working seriously in making an in –depth study of the troubles of Indian Diaspora.

Key words: Diaspora, transitional, immigration, communities, second generation immigrants.

I

The word Diaspora came into origin when for the first time communities started emigrating to the new lands and new pastures. If we turn the pages of history we will find that the Jews and the Greeks were one of the first communities who had the transitional period. Gradually, more immigration followed by the Africans, Chinese, Lebanese, and also the Indians.

Early immigration from India to Ceylon and South East Asia owes its origin to Buddhism. The Buddhist missionaries travelled far and wide for spreading their religion and had to pass through great ordeals and so they had the Diasporic feelings. Similarly Hindu

kingdoms of Medieval South East Asia also sent their vassals far and wide for the recognition and popularity of their Empire. Further the Indian Ocean trading system also made it easy for the Indians to travel and migrate to far off places like East Africa, South East Asia and Middle East. This continued to attract labour and craftsmen from India for fine arts and architecture.

The modern Indian Diaspora further strengthened in nineteenth century British Imperialism. After 1857 Sepoy Mutiny in northern India the British colonies were consolidated for their safety and security, but from time to time the Indians had to suffer under heavy tax burdens. The collection of these taxes gave impetus to the Britishers in the spreading rapid industries far and wide. This was the period when India was known as the Golden Bird but then she started fading and becoming pauper and penniless for various reason. On the other hand the British trade flourished worldwide. For this task Britain depended upon continuing streams of emigrants to all its colonies. During this period agriculture came to be regarded as a means of producing national wealth. Therefore the English society was maintaining a high standard by general application of new agricultural methods, by improving the cultivation of Potatoes, Turnip oil cakes, roots and clovers and therefore at the time of its reaping they needed more and more farmers and laborers'.¹ On one hand the population growth in Britain was declining, because of the wars and on the other hand emigrants from Ireland and Scotland were becoming an asset in the growth of England's economy, therefore many British people were not willing to go overseas.

Roughly at the same time slavery came to an end. European immigrants were repulsed by the harsh climate and tropical diseases prevailing in the Caribbean basin and so they did not settle therein significant numbers. But they looked for other options. They took labourers aside from the African ex-slaves and European immigrants, the colonial governments turned to the roughly 250 million inhabitants of India.² Most of the Hindi-speaking from Northern subcontinents were resettled from India to British Caribbean after being promised fair wages

and return travel to India in exchange for a predetermined number of year spent in working in the colonies. Thus the first pouring out of the Indians started 1840's. According to G.M. Trevelyan in English social History we get references that the wages were as low as a few pennies and many time twopence whereas the husbandmen were getting three pounds a year or a little more ³. These labourers had to work in iron factories or coal mines. Early nineteenth century was known as the "Age of coal and Iron" ⁴. Coal has always played a great part in the development of a country because it is the national wealth. The Indian and African immigrant labours had capitalist employers and they did not care for the working condition and the life of the labours. The pits were dip and the miners had to work precarious condition underground. The life was terrible and often women and children also were employed underground. Thus coal and iron created a new gulf between classes. There were hardworking peasants and artisans but the life of these coalminers was so vey miserable that many use to die because of ill health and diasporic feelings.

Gradually business further flourished not only through sea routes but also roads and railways. There were improved harbours and trade increased not only on river Thames but also shifted to the west to catch the American trade. But it is sad that the capitalist employers were neither fair nor honest towards their Indian employee. Very few of these Indians indentured laboures ever returned to India and by 1860's they acquired a reputation as hard workers. Indian contract labourers had become the global working class of the Britain by 1870.

Then emerged the first generation of the western-educated Indians, who also imbibed themselves in the British colonial services attracted by high wages. Initially they worked as lower rank clerks but gradually by the beginning of 20th century, achieved respectable positions. More numbers of the merchants' classes were attracted by the mail sent by the Indian Civil servants to their homeland and so large communities of Indian merchants and their families particularly the north Indians, Tamils, Sikhs and Jains migrated to foreign lands.

The Indian Diasporic development was hastened by the British Empire's adoption of economic self-dependence. The Indian masses could be better controlled by Indian Civil servants than by the non-Indians. The Indian administrators encouraged the immigration of more Hindus constituting roughly 60-65 % of the total population of Fiji and Surinam in 1900. Still many Indians left for Britain, seeking education and the joys of life in Empire's heart. Eventually, after 1911, many Indians shifted to the join Hindu colonies overseas, where they successfully earned for their children better economic future through sheer perseverance, labour and thrift but their literature in the form of poetry, novels, prose and journals has a deep reflection of the Indian Diaspora, some of the outstanding literary figures who wrote about Diaspora were Robert Southey whose some of the famous poems are 'Thalaba', 'History of peninsular Wars', ' After Blenheim' etc. Henry L. V. Derozio – his famous long narrative poem 'The Faqir of Jugheera' , 'Ezra Pound', ' Nissim Ezekiel'; he and Ruskin Bond are the winners of the highest literary honour in India – The Padma Shree. Esther Lyons also wrote on Indian Diaspora.

Michel Madhusudan Dutt started writing in English and his work was praised for his rich vocabulary and grand style. Gosse introduced the works of Sarojini Naidu. Novelists like Rudyard Kipling- best known for his Jungle Book which has inspired numerous other literary works and adaptations to television and films, E.M. Forster's A Passage to India - a book permitted by an atmosphere of tragic incompatibility between two races which admits of no mutual understanding;⁵ Aldous Huxley's Brave New World ; George Orwell's Animal Farm ; James Joyce's Ulysses and Somerset Maugham's Of Human Bondage and Cakes and Ale have works of excellence and are immensely read. Poets like W.B.Yeats- best known for his Lake Isle of Innisfree and Byzantium and T.S. Eliot – famous for The wasteland also wrote about oriental philosophy and the ways of life. The Anglo – Indian writers too have carved out a

niche. The subjects of the novels on Diaspora are identity displacement, nostalgia and memories.

II

On the scenario, many of the emigrants migrated from India to America from early days, the United States has always taken a keen interest in India and the Indians. America won independence in 1776 and in 1777 a member of the American Continental Congress remarked: “It is reported that the East Indians have risen upon their oppressors, (Great Britain)..... This is all good news.”⁶ The United States wanted extensive maritime trade with India. The first contracts were made in 1786 when their ships sailed up to the Hooghly River into the port of Calcutta. In the following year four more ships were trading in Bombay, Surat and Calcutta. As the trade grew rapidly so did the immigration and emigration.

The Americans had to make strong efforts in settling down in India, because the Britishers always opposed their efforts. It was decided establish a Consulate in India. Constant efforts were made right from 1792 to 1852, and many Americans tourists kept on visiting India from 1847 to 1857. During this period the American Consul General in Calcutta imported the first Brahman cattle to America and in 1890 took for American fairs, Indian jugglers, swami, jewels and carpets.

So with their contacts with the local people the American consuls and their staffs raised Indian awareness both in commerce and in culture which found new expressions. There was cultural bonding and philosophical interactions. The Parsis and the Hindus always had strong sympathetic attitude for the United States. Thus a new kind of Indian Diaspora took shape in 19th and 20th Century. Swami Vivekananda was the first great Indian to visit U.S. in 1893. He won thunderous appreciation for his very first words, “Sisters and brothers of America.....”⁷ Thus the Indians always had great influence on the Americans. Many British and American Missionaries had deep contacts with India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy made friends with American

Missionaries who were fascinated by the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Geeta.

The literary scenario predicted by the Anglo Indian writers was gradually getting impressive after a few hiccups. Their stories were sad and full of nostalgia. They often missed the smell of the food, the fragrance of flowers and incense sticks. They wrote about the streets of Calcutta and the bazaars of Hyderabad. A horde of Anglo-Indian writers wrote about Diaspora as they missed their country and the village roads. The literature was written in poetry and story form and in the form of novels. Some of greatest American writers of 19th century had the seed of Vedic heritage, for e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. Robert Frost though considered to be a poet of New England later built up his reputation as one of the most popular 20th century American poets. His poem blend colloquialism and traditional verse couching a home spun philosophy. In his words ‘a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom’. He won the Pulitzer Prize four times. On the other hand Ravindra Nath Tagore made five visits to the United States. He loved the people and their literature. Jiddu Krishnamurthy belonged to Madras Theosophical Society but settled in California and wrote extensively. Raja Rao is another Philosopher and novelist who explained India to Americans and America to the Indians. He felt that two countries has complementary forces. A.K. Ramanujan is another major literary link between India and America, his own original English Poetry has the tones of Diaspora and he stands as a towering figure in the world of Indo – Anglian literature.

Among the later Twentieth Century prolific writers are Vikram Seth. Vikram Seth lived, studied and worked in America as well as in England and China. His first novel is The Golden Gate Written in 1986. It is in verse form. It is about life in San Francisco and has so realistic details of rural life and the vineyards that even the Native Americans are spell bound at such realism. It has beautiful cross culture bonding with America. Western interest further increased in Indian writers in 1989 when Iranian clerics issued a Fatwa against Salman Rushdie

for his satanic verses. Readers and publishers alike are nowadays very different from the post colonial period. We find many new Indian writers writing in English. This interest further growing with award winning prizes and the readers enjoy the narrative tradition and the good story mixed with culture.⁸ Kiran Desai's Booker-Winning novel The Inheritance of Loss also reveals the pangs of separation among the characters. Rohinton Mistry's extraordinary works such as A Fine Balance, Family Matters or Such a Long Journey to provide a better reading displaying the elements of Diaspora.

The following works on Indian Diaspora are also worth reading. The Namesake and Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri have stories tightly woven with a sense of connection to the land and the people left behind. They reflect about individual and community struggle and show that there is a strong effort to have a mixture of traditions. Another outstanding author of this period writing on Diaspora is Anita Rau Badami. Her two novels The Hero's Walk and Tamarind Men reflect the life between two worlds, the gaps, confusions and conflicts between Here and There and multigenerational families lost in personal preoccupations. She says it is "the unsettled feeling" that fuels her writing. "It is precisely because I live between worlds that I write the kind of fiction that I do" Bharti Mukherjee's "The difficult Daughters" also traces the life of three sisters spread in San Francisco, New Jersey and Mumbai.⁹

Suhana Singh Baldwin's What the body Remembers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage too have elements of Diasporic lament. Samina Ali is the first Muslim Indian woman whose novel Madras on Rainy Days has been published in United States. It takes inside the world not often explored in American fiction. Commenting on her novel Bharti Mukherjee has said "with her debut novel", Ali makes her bold entrance on the scene of immigrant literature, in language that is lyrical and unsentimental, she explores the upside and the downside of being a first generation Muslim Indo-American Woman.¹⁰ Thus now novels are rolling off the press like rubber tyres at factories.

Slowly and gradually many Indians have started settling in American States. Initially they had to fight for their recognition and identity, due to racial differences, at first for the self and then for the community, there was inadequate understanding of Asian-American Cultural identity. Eventually in 1960's there was Black Civil Rights Movement. Through stories, novels, plays and poetry the Diasporic sensibilities were given a challenge. With more and more influx the Asian percentage of the United States population has increased and the Diasporic feeling has now come to its lowest ebb. Citizens now all over the world are living as mixed races. The sweet and bitter memories and experiences of these immigrants have mitigated and are fading to a great extent and for the first time they are feeling satisfied of being members of the main stream.¹¹ The Symbiotic Relationship has been finally nurtured by the Indian Diaspora.. Thus through this paper I have made my humble effort to peep and reflect the problems and difficulties and the hopes and expectations of these overseas Indian communities Now the Indian government is also working seriously in making an in –depth study of the troubles of Indian Diaspora. A High Level Committee has been set up by the government on the lines of Planning Commission and The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is dealing with the affairs of such Indians.

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